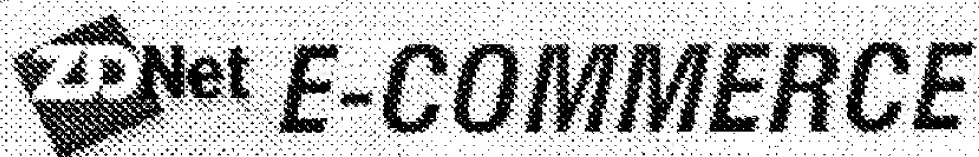


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Free market

By Bonny L. Georgia, PC Computing
January 18, 2000 12:00 AM ET

You know the money's on the Net. Companies that use the Web as another way to sell their goods and services doubled their revenues last year—to the tune of \$170 billion, according to a recent University of Texas study.

But can you really sell online without sinking thousands of dollars into Web design, servers, and software? Absolutely. A handful of sites offer free electronic storefronts—and we're not talking about cheesy prefab designs and a few megabytes of Web storage. The top free services offer flexible design options and extras like reporting and marketing tools so you can establish repeat customers and generate new ones.

We tested the freebies against paid services in the *PC Computing* Business Labs to help you decide when a gratis e-store is enough and when you need to bring in the hired guns. Our testers put the services through their paces—from setting up a store to analyzing sales and traffic. For-pay e-commerce services typically offer a higher level of customization and more sophisticated tools. But they're not necessarily better—or easier to use—than the services that don't charge a dime.

Bonny L. Georgia is a Massachusetts-based freelance writer who specializes in small-business technology.

Text continues...

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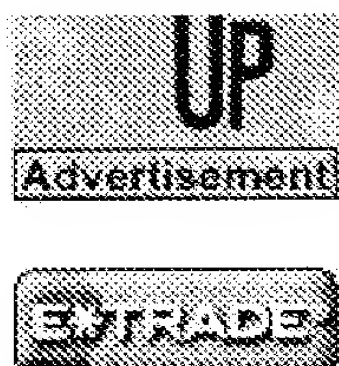
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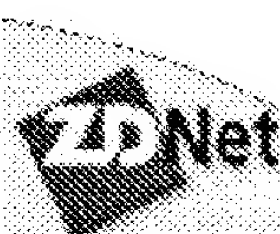
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